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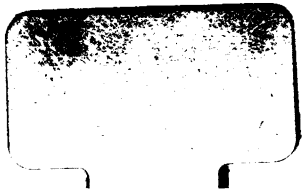

★ Publishers Weekly

May 31 06

(Leonard)
NBI

MY LADY OF THE SEARCH-LIGHT

Not in L.
6.12.06

MY LADY OF THE SEARCH-LIGHT

BY
MARY HALL LEONARD

THE GRAFTON PRESS
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
P 175726
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
1906

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PRELUDE.

FROM the Orient came a voice
In the Ages Primal,
'Unto man is woman's lot
For his use and blessing.'

Europe's Middle Epoch then
Spake in accents courtly
'Nay, to her with knightly grace
Man shall yield devotion.'

Modern Age and Western World
What is *thy* decision?
Speak with wisdom to the ears
Of the listening future.

MY LADY OF THE SEARCH-LIGHT

TRIUMPHANT, steady, rich in human freight,
Her course achieved, the stately vessel rode
Into the harbor, and upon its deck
We stood, we two, and watched the shifting scene.
Below us noisy in the cabin thronged
A many-languaged multitude that sought
Homes in the Occident, the chance to breathe
New aspirations in a newer world.

Peaceful had been our voyage. Day by day
Dreamily and inert we had reclined
In our deck armchairs, while our half-closed eyes
Scanned ocean's panorama, seething waves
Bright-crested, foam beflecked, long rolling surge
With valleys green, a billowy restless main
Alike majestic in repose or wrath.

The silver-wingéd sea-fowl skirted by,
The freshening breeze across our foreheads blew,
And under placid skies the obedient waves
With rhythmic lullabies beguiled our hearts
To yield ourselves to the alluring spell
Of the vast, amorous, seductive sea,
The great immensity that wraps the earth,
Divider and uniter of the worlds.

But now at last arrived the journey's end,
And through the blissful waning afternoon
The land signs thickened, hovering land-birds sailed
About our masts, and perfumes from the shore
Mixed with the salty spray. The pilot came
To guide us through the channel, bringing news
Of the great world that we for one brief week
Had nigh forgotten. Every fluttering heart
Felt the allurements of the welcoming land,
While the soft twilight drew her tenuous veil
Of golden haze, and draped the embracing shores
And headlands glimmering through the misty sheen.
Then as the glow dissolved, the infant moon
Her sickle drew, and myriad lights of heaven
Gleamed softly one by one, and answering lights
Kindled on sea and shore. So stood we still,
Responsive, sympathetic, and forebore
To utter idle words, but held our peace.

MY LADY OF THE SEARCH-LIGHT

The twilight spell was broken and the night
Closed firmly in, and yet no evening hush
Fell on the brilliant scene, nor interlude
Of shadowing silence. Night and day alike
The thronging ships with noisy signallings
And waving pennons travel in and out
With enterprise unwearied. So from us
The mood of silence passed. "How good to breathe
These airs of freedom," my companion said,
"To feel the New World stimulus and poise,
The fresher life unburdened by the past,
Where the ungraven tablet may be traced
With fairer records, newer hopes."

But I:

"I am a woman, and to me perforce
The woman's side appears. Grateful I am
For woman's lot in free America.
Here she may feel the vital breath of Heaven
Filling her soul, enabling her to soar
On wings of aspiration, love, and faith.
So Hail America,—again I cry,
America—the woman's earthly Heaven."

Now toward its moorings drew our noble ship.
And all around us on the bay we saw
The gleaming flickering lights like firefly lamps
From white-winged sailing fleets and vessels huge
Waving gay flags of every varied hue;
And most admired, our nation's stars and stripes
Lifted in triumph o'er the king of all
That ocean craft, a cruiser built for war,
Full-armed and rigged, a naval potentate.

..ow on this ocean monarch every eye
V ith eagerness was turned. For on its deck
The new Olympian Jove with magic powers
Was forging modern lightning bolts designed
For gentle ends, beneficent to man.
So as we watched and waited shot there forth
A searchlight signal, bold, insistent, clear,
A broad electric beam of whitest flame
Circling the horizon to its utmost rim,
As thc·igh the Angel of the Seven Seals
Would search remotest corners of the world
For souls in hiding at the Judgment Day.
At last the circuit made, it lingering fell
Full on the spot where just before us loomed
The lofty pedestal and towering form
Of the Bartholdi Statue as it rose
From out the bosom of the tranquil bay.

Serene, majestic, massive, there it stood
This woman shape, a goddess aureole-crowned.
Her lifted right hand held aloft the torch
Of freedom's flame; within her left she grasped
A graven tablet. In her mien appeared
Something more womanly because conjoined
With gifts that manhood boasts as highest crown,
Even as manliness most virile seems
When touched with tender graces. Did we see
The New World type of Freedom's prophecy?
Or was the symbol womanhood itself
Inspired by Liberty's immortal strength?

Now as the searching shaft of crystal fire
Fell on My Lady's face, there came a hush
For a brief instant o'er the multitude
That watched the pageant from the vessel's deck,
As dim perceiving sacramental gleams
Of inspiration in those questioning eyes.
For a full moment's pause it rested there
That penetrating beam. As rapt I gazed
Drinking the revelation, suddenly
Methought the statue spoke; or was it then
Its Angel whispered to my listening soul
From silent lips a heaven-born oracle?
Beside me stood my friend with eyes aglow.
Yet when he spoke I knew that not to him

Had come the statue's story. Mine alone
The vision, mine must be its record then.
Yea, and I give it here, the very words
The statue uttered, or, if failing that,
The truthful impress that was born that hour
Within my soul, and after in my dreams
Sleeping or waking, and I care not which,
Grew to a fadeless and symmetric whole.
Whether 'twere prophecy, or history's word,
Or nature's voice in allegoric strain,
Whether within the body or without
My spirit moved or rested in a trance,
Alike indifferent seems. Whether a flash
Across the subtle wires of human thought
Brought subtler insight till I well could swear
The statue said it—know I only this,
That here I do essay to write with truth
A tale that somehow in essential lines
Was poured into my soul from that calm face
Illumined by that white electric ray.

THE STATUE'S STORY.

WHEN Life and Love were young was born a child
Whose foster-mother, Nature, bending low
Above her cradle prest the cup of life
Unto the baby lips. "Drink deep, sweet-heart,
The mingled draught of fervent womanhood."
Then kissed by fortune's smiles she grew apace,
Flitting in freedom as the butterfly
From sweet to sweet. With searching eyes she roamed
Forest and field, claiming a kinship close
With flowers and trees, questioned the bee and bird
For nature's secrets, eager e'er to prove
Her universal birthright.

Close beside
Abode another child, a boy endowed
With dauntless vigor. As the driven sap
Drinks the effulgence of the approaching spring
And presses upward, so his virile powers
Wakened responsively to nature's sun
Greening toward promised fruitage.

[redacted]

And doubting not that all Creation swung
In orbit round his self-poised entity,
To this philosophy he keyed his life.

How fared it with Querella? Earnest eyes
Grew large with asking 'Wherefore was I born?'
'How shall I read life's cipher?' Visions thronged,
Folding her heart in fancy's solitude.

Then Manlius came, so masterful and brave.
His whelming presence with magnetic power
Swept all her being,—body, brain and heart,
In the strong current of his mastery.

Blindly they yielded to the impetuous tide,
Unwary mariners, and little recked
Of chart and compass lacking, and the need
For pilot guidance that should safely steer
Their fragile life-boat o'er life's stormy sea.

The fateful die was cast; the vow was sealed;
And Love's coercion with resistless force
Hurling their souls together linked the bands,
Snapping all other ties to make them one.

So life's great drama, which in every age
Is writ in youthful hearts, the curtain drew,
And its initial act was played once more.

SONG OF MANLIUS.

COME, sweet love, thy magic presence
Doth my heart with rapture thrill;
To my fevered yearning spirit
Speak the joyful word 'I will.'

Tasks of skill and fame await me,
Yet if thou my suit deny
All my gifts were blighted promise.
Yield thee, darling, or I die.

As the bow unto the viol,
As the crown to royal king,
To my ineffectual being
Thy perfective graces bring.

Paradise with man as sovereign,
All creation at his feet,
Emptied of its bliss must languish
Unless love its joys complete.

Come then, ministering angel,
By the paths thy mothers trod
Thou shalt find thine own fulfilment,
Thou to me, and I to God.

Thus Manlius to Querella, nor did dream
But that himself had wisdom to ordain
Life's rulings for them both, that so her heart
Should rest in peace, trusting his love,—ah, yes,
For sure he loved her as a man may love
Part of his very self,—so should his love
Wax perfect, as she merged herself in him;
So ran his thought, this youthful egotist.

QUERELLA'S SONG.

LIFE is aglow! Be still my beating heart
That I may comprehend
The thrills that through my wakened pulses start,
And raptures to each vibrant sense impart.
O whither doth it tend?

Beloved, former aspirations lie
Buried forevermore.
From a dark chrysalis emerging I
Arise on wing unfettered to the sky,
In azure heights to soar.

I am most poor, but that thy quickening love,
Ennobleth all, I ween,
That bears thy impress,—joy all joys above.
Sleep flies my eyelids. Ecstasy doth move
My spirit depths serene.

Ingraft with thine, dear heart, my soul shall grow.
Thy steadfast weal alone,
Thy hopes, thy aims, thy prayers henceforth I'll know,
My one glad mission, since I love thee so
To make thy joys mine own.

Had I ne'er met thee—ah, that fatal miss
Had brought what sorrowings rife!
But now,—oh perfect and unmeasured bliss,
All bliss is mine, as life is lost in this,
To be thy love, thy wife.

So sang Querella. But she little dreamt
Of what the years would teach her, of the time
When mortal need must turn to God alone
For help and fulness. Let the lessons wait.

And so they stood and vowed before high Heaven
She to obey, he cherish, both to love.

And both did mean the vow, and so began
Anew earth's Eden tale of wedded souls.

Then what befell? Answer ye worldly wise
Trained in Experience' school! How fared it then
With these young hearts embarked in one frail skiff
For a life-voyage over heaving seas?
Could he, the ardent and self-centered soul,
Be trusted like a God to care for hers?
Should she, the woman, let her being sink
Its depth in his, with endless unreserve?
How long, bethink you, did it take to bring
To both reaction? For should Manlius fail
His personal life to hold in perfect poise
How then another's? Or if she, his wife,
Misjudge the wifely debt, shall dual souls
Forbear to vindicate the personal claim?
Yet loyal vows with love's sustaining bands,
Linked by devoted hearts have iron strength.

And so Querella, striving to fulfill
Her wifely part, brought forth in pain a child
Unto her husband, and in weakness strove
To please his wish in all, and held her peace
If selfish impulse or a blind desire
O'erstepped the just demand; and made excuse

For every failing; yea, e'en justified,
Deeming it meet that his career should be
The goal of mutual effort, grieving most
That limitations in herself should fail
His expectation; morbidly indeed
Blaming herself for these and feeding still
His blinded selfhood. Ah, how sad the sight
Of worse than wasted wealth of wifely love!

But Manlius felt at times the measure hard
His wife should lack so far the power to fill
His cup of joy, that loveliness should fade
And strength decline. Yet would he honor still
His nuptial vow. Besides 'twere wise withal,
For so are women better ruled if love
The scepter wield. So he provided well
For child and wife with duteous care, despite
Complacent Virtue's lack of full reward.

Now to Querella's heart the baby brought
New tasks of love. The helpless clinging life
Division gave to duty. Manlius' share
Must suffer some eclipse, as Motherhood
Woke call responsive in Querella's soul.
Her husband was a man, equipped with powers
For manly effort. If she failed in aught

Of wifely mission, there were other springs
For his advantage. Nay, she reasoned still,
His faithful wife and helpmeet (well she knew)
Was far from being all in all to him;
But for this tender life thus given in trust
Into her keeping,—ah, if she should fail
In mother-service, what for baby then?

Were even bonds of nuptial love so close
As ties that bind the mother to the babe
That draws its life pre-natal from the springs
Of her rapt being? Thus Querella mused,
Spending with royal lavishment her strength
In service for her husband and her child;
But when the ambitious world insistent claimed
The busy brain of Manlius, gently then
Querella stifled thoughts of self and turned
To the sweet solace found in mother-love.

THE MOTHER'S SONG.

HUSH thee, my babe, 'tis thy mother that holds thee.
Freely her strength doth supply
Life's brimming fount, as her presence enfolds thee
With soothings of soft lullaby.
Down to the Dreaming-land softly he goes,
Peacefully yielding to nature's repose.

Gladly I lavish health, beauty, and pleasure,
Yea, life itself would I give
To rescue from peril the innocent treasure
For whose dear future I live.
Nurture of manhood my highest employ,
Motherhood's burden is womanhood's joy.

Keep me from failure O Father Eternal,
Out of thy plenitude lend
Wisdom and strength for my mission maternal
And crown with thy blessing its end.
Better than riches or ease or renown
Better than life is Motherhood's crown.

Thus fared the months. But now another heart
Was beating neath Querella's, while her spent
Vitality refused the double load.
And Manlius full of lusty vigor failed
The signs to interpret, even secretly
Harbored a mute complaining. It was hard
A weakly wife to cherish. Had he been
In lesser haste to wed, mayhap his choice
Had wiser proven. Now, alack, he'd make
The best of it, perforce; so fitful tried
To ease her burdens by occasional thought
Detached from other interests and given
Unto the world of home.

And so, one day
Arrived the crisis. Mother-love and pain
O'ercame Querella and grim-visaged Death
Stood nigh to snatch her to his darkened realm.
Unconscious there with fluttering breath she lay
And ebbing pulse, while the attendants moved
In noiseless waiting for the final sigh.

Remorseful anguish conquered Manlius then.
Kneeling beside her couch he prayed to God
And to his wife with tears, "O dearest love,
Return and let me prove repentance true,
And win forgiveness. Turn to earth once more,

It needs you and I need you. Leave me not,
Life of my life, heart of my heart, come back."

Then the pale sufferer oped her glazing eyes,
And feebly smiled and said "Dear love, I tried
To do my duty, but my strength was small."
So closed her lids, and the attendant said
"The life is going."—Suddenly the lips
Were seen to move. "My baby" was the word
They weakly framed. Softly the nurses brought
The new-born infant and the elder child
Led by the hand, who lisped with childish glee
"Kiss Mamma," and they placed him on the bed
And let his soft lips brush the icy brow.
Now at the instant did the sleeping babe
Utter a wailing cry. At touch and sound
The sinking woman stirred and tried to speak.
They brought her cordials and with impulse new
She strove to swallow. Then the flickering pulse
Showed conscious beat again. Returning will
Lent skill to effort and the mother-heart
Smiled faintly on her babes, and gently sank,
Not in the arms of death but healing sleep.
And when she waked, her husband who all night
Had held his kneeling vigil cried with tears
Clasping her to his close embrace, "Dear heart,

Given back to me out of the jaws of death."
And his wife answered "Yes, and to my babes."

Then all that wealth and loving could devise
Did Manlius lavish for the invalid's cure,
Wooing her smiles with offerings dearly bought
Like a fond lover winning first his bride;
Till lured by sunshine of affection's care
Back to the ways of earth Querella came
With youthful health and beauty all restored,
Yea, and enhanced beneath the light of love.

Now Manlius looked on her with altered eyes.
No more her precious life should waste its wealth
In menial tasks. An angel pure she seemed
Vouchsafed from Heaven above to lift his soul
To purer heights. Her hand should hold the prize
While grosser man should win for love of her
Life's tournaments. Woman was manhood's queen,
Nay, saint within his home, his private shrine
Where he might daily worship. She should be
His advocate with Heaven. But sacredly
Apart from noisy revels and the strife
Of rude opinions must her soul be kept,
As love, not knowledge, doth her being sway.
Man on his part would be her earthly prop,

Her lamp of wisdom and defender brave
From base-born perils of the grosser sort.
In sheltered privacy within the home
Provided by his care, no stain should mar
The polished glass of her sweet purity.
Thus the decree of Manlius for his wife
And for the infant daughter of his love.

QUEEN OF HEARTS.

QUEEN of hearts, to thee I sing,
At thy feet my own I fling,
Loyal tribute freely bring,
Fair Woman.

Guardian angel by my side,
In thy counsels I'll confide
Lest my wavering footsteps slide,
Pure Woman.

Man's devotion shall extend
Strength to succor and defend,
Loving shelter gladly lend,
Sweet Woman.

Walls of home thy cherished bound,
Best delights therein are found,
Thus is life and living crowned,
Dear Woman.

In Love's kingdom throned apart
Thou a gentle sovereign art,
Rest thee in thy husband's heart,
Blest Woman.

Happy Querella basking in his love
Fairer and sweeter grew and wore her part
With wifely fondness and unwavering trust
In her knightly lover.

So the days flew by.
And all was lovely and brave tales were told
By Manlius to the world, of bliss of home,
Of woman's surer instincts, saintlier mind,
The fitting law that while on man was laid
The outward rule, yet hers the gift to sway
By subtler energies his sovereign will.
Hers then the dearest headship after all
Could her submissive heart accept its own.

So all the world approved. Querella too
Smiled in contentment with her lavish home
Well-ordered, and the children grew apace.

So seemed it. Did this tell the story quite?
What in the lone hour secrets spake her soul?
Woman had heart and feeling. Had she brain?
Were mental talents given and yet denied
The right to use them? Such decree were hard
To justify. Since our first mother fell
Woman as lief as man hath knowledge craved,
And risked her soul for gaining its fair fruit.
O foolish man! Think well before thou dare
To legislate the bound of woman's world,
Thyself must suffer if there be mistake.

Now in her quiet hours Querella fed,
But secretly, these inner wants represt,
Wrestled with science, pondering long and deep
Perplexing doubts and questions. If by chance
Her husband found her thus, anon he smiled
Indulgently, "What, sweet, and dost thou think
To weigh such matters? They are not for thee."
And she responsive laid the book aside,
And smiled as was her duty, yielding thus
To gentle fondling and the arts of love.

The years sped on. But for the children now
Life's problems rose. The boy was placed at school,
Tutored in manly arts, with bars let down
To every road and freest vantage given
For starting on life's race.

As to the girl,
The Mother said, "Let Filia have it too,
The liberal training."

But the father said
"Nay, dearest heart, her narrower mission calls
For gentle arts and sweet accomplishments
That make a woman wise and womanly;
No stint in these, so they be truly used
To lift her to the final place that fits
Her woman's nature."

Then the gathering flow
Of pent-up feeling in Querella's soul
So long represt, burst the restraining bands.
At first a tiny rift, but as the flood
O'ercame resistance, painfully it surged
In tides of passion.

First with cynic tone,
"Her 'woman's nature' say you? Tell me then,
Hath every mind in all the universe

Or man or bird or beast, the leave to try
All paths, use every talent, save indeed
Woman, the only thing fate hath condemned
To occupy a SPHERE?"

But Manlius stood
With wondering dismay. "How now? This comes
Of books beyond thy scope. I should have seen
The menace. It doth mar the polished stone
To jostle o'er the highway. Question not,
My wife and daughter. You are both unversed
In the world's wickedness. I pray you trust
My clearer wisdom. Thankful should you be
For your safe Eden and exemption blest
From burdens men must bear. Filia shall have
All true advantage. Be content. Have peace."

But ah, Querella could not be content.
That which for self her wifehood had renounced,
The more insistent for her daughter now
She must demand.

Passionate then she spoke.
"Woman, poor fool, they say that she was made
Not for herself, but man. So may she use
Only such talents as he giveth leave.
Our work is supervised and man must set
Its price in the market. He alone is free,

Woman his slave; if petted and caressed
No less the vassal."

Manlius then with scorn
"Thou foolish woman. Let thy brawling cease."
Querella, half repentant, now with tears,
"But nay, my husband, for I meant it not,
Save in the general. Gentle hast thou been,
Most true and tender to thy wife who pleads;
So let thy innate justice now reply.
The question will not down. Women and men,
Are they co-equal halves of the human whole,
Or is the woman nature's underling?"

But Manlius frowning stood nor answer deigned,
Until the daughter by the mother's side
Pleaded for opportunity as free
As was her brother's. Then the mother-heart
Took up the theme again. To many a trite
And fettering maxim that had passed as truth
Unquestioned, now Querella dared to make
Denial bold.

As to a wayward child
A parent deals displeasure, Manlius then
Quoted the Scripture's plain demands,—to yield
Honor and due obedience to her lord

Whose helpmeet she was made. Woman's the task
To bring forth children, to be chaste, discreet,
Good works to do, and modestly refrain
From public clamor; would she learn in aught
To question of her husband first at home.
Querella laughed. And mockingly that laugh
Did sink in Manlius' tempest-riven soul
And drove the sharpened wedge that should divide
Their mutual trust.

"Nay, it is man" she cried
"Who to his selfish ends interpreteth
The blessed Scripture. 'Tis some strange mistake.
God ne'er denies what He himself hath writ
In a woman's heart. The Blessed Book itself
Hath lifted woman to her rightful place
Beside her Brother Christ, the Man of men;
And we thy wife and daughter dare appeal
To Heaven's Eternal Judgment Bar our claims
Of sacred womanhood."

Aghast he stood
This wondering husband, at such impious words
From one he thought the sum of pious love
And sweet submission to the lot ordained
Of God and nature.

Then with hot disdain,
"Dost think thy puerile brain can conquer realms
Of art, of governance, of public weal,
Where never woman yet did laurels win?
Let the presumptuous youth who fain would guide
Across the heavens the chariot of the sun
Warn thee from folly that would overturn
The well-poised universe."

Persistent still
Querella answered, "History recks of Queens
Who need not doff their royal crowns abashed
Before their kingly peers. Yet vantage free
And educative Time alone may say
What woman's gifts include. Whate'er I *can*
That may I. Then if failure looms, not man
But nature hath restraining fetters laid."

With wrath of triumph Manlius now, "Aha,
Then are they laid already. So indeed
Thy madness speaketh reason. Dost not know
That *War* doth judge the court of last appeal,
And might hath final headship? Wilt thou take
Thy boasted talents into battle's fray
And win thy scepter thus? If not, forbear
To mar thy womanhood in vain attempt
To pair thyself with man in manhood's realms."

"I know not how the Court of War shall judge
My cause," Querella said, "The earth doth wait
The promised Age of Peace. Grim War itself
May change its visage, growing more humane
Through gains of Science, or indeed,—who knows?—
By woman's ingress. This I surely know:
In all of human welfare woman holds
Inherent part, and all,—yea, man himself,—
Must suffer detriment, if woman's share
Be disallowed. Yet as a woman still
She entereth into all, and finds her place,
Not of man's tutelage, nor yet restrained
By fear of man's rebuke, but owning first
Nature the primal guide of all alike.
Thus as a woman now I claim my part
In all that is."

Dumb with amazement first
Stood Manlius. Then with dry and whitening lips
He answered, "Foolish woman, be it so;
Until you learn in shame and misery
To prize the kingdom that you thus resign."

Querella awed yet resolute, "Forgive,
Yet hear me still. The woman best doth know
The woman's portion. How should man disport
As judge and jury both? Not I to thee

And thou to God; but with my husband I
In mutual faith must look alike to God.
I dare not turn nor falter. Future years
Wait on my act. Womanhood yet unborn
Pleadeth to bring this question to the test.
Now for all women's sake with solemn vow
I go to prove it. Husband, fare thee well."

And Manlius deadly pale, with voice suppress,
"Then go, as thou hast said. I with my son
Mingling with ranks of men and large affairs
Accept the desolate hearth and ruined home
Until the wife and mother turns again
Unto her duty. All my manhood now
Biddeth me join the issue to the end.
Try your experiment. We'll test the case
And find the resultant. Go thy chosen path,
And for thy speeding here is gold. I pray
You take it feeely. It would cause me pain
That wife or daughter suffer. Go,—farewell."

"Nay Manlius," said Querella, "keep your gold,
We need it not, for I myself may earn.
But thank you none the less, my husband, dear
As when I plighted first my maiden troth.

Yet must we part. Thus only may we win
Release from senile fetters. If a sphere
I own, 'tis large as yours whose radius meets
The starry dome encircling boundless space,
The universe of matter and of mind.
Naught else can I accept, no more than you.
God keep you, husband.—Daughter, come.—Farewell."
"Farewell, Querella." So they went their ways.

A WOMAN'S QUESTION.

THE fount of life hath flowing springs,
Are they to me forbid?
Shall truth's sweet light, O Bounteous God,
Be from thy children hid?

Were not all paths that lead to good
Made to thy daughters free
When ancient fetters were dissolved
In gospel liberty?

Perchance thy subtle wish, O man,
Hath Scripture truth misread,
To my own heart I'll turn to list
What God to me hath said.

Unto the pattern shown within
I'll first of all be true,
And oh! believe me, only thus
Can I be true to you.

Taking her daughter's hand Querella stept
Into the larger life as steps a queen,
And every door of human effort swung
Unto her knock. So marvelled all the world
As arts, professions, trades or high or low,
Science, invention, politics and creeds
Grew richer with the woman's side revealed.
But if in lonely hours Querella felt
An empty void, with yearnings deep for ties
Thus sundered, who shall say? She held her peace.

THE VOICE OF THE AGES.

A VOICE from the ages is sending
To the listening future a cry
With echoes prophetic of destiny blending,
Yet pausing in vain for reply.

Like the rhythmic sob of the ocean,
Like the surf that beats on the shore,
Like forest-born sighings of wind in commotion
Swells the refrain evermore.

Whence sprang the woman to being?
Whither doth womanhood tend?
How shall her life to its impulse agreeing,
Into the universe blend?

Philosophy straineth to learn it,
While History, Scripture and Art
Are heavily prest with the task to discern it,
The meaning of womanhood's part.

But think not ye prophets and sages,
Masculine mentors and seers,
Ye only may compass the question of ages
More difficult grown with the years.

Nor yet shall the irritant wrangle
Of woman's inconsequent zeal
Resolve for the world the complicate tangle
In a verdict surpassing appeal.

Nay, human and angel and devil
And Heaven and the Earth are involved,
And children unborn shall inherit the evil
If falsely the question be solved.

And yet after all must the woman
The final adjudicant find
In the issue so weighty to interests human,–
Her place in the realm of mankind.

Bring forward your arguments forceful,
Let all in due order be heard,
But woman herself from her nature resourceful
Shall utter the ultimate word.

Yet No! Let humanity ponder
Together its problems so vast,
And link with discretion and wisdom and wonder
The present, the future, the past.

YEARS came and went. The Twentieth Century's dawn
Had risen in promise, but with problems new
Ever confronting. So one day was heard
The invitation that from near and far
Should delegates for every Cause convene
In the brave city where the Golden Gate
Opens its latch-string toward the Orient,
For the westering Car of Empire had fulfilled
Its course of triumph round the spheral globe
And linked the evening and the morn together.

Thus came they on, a group of congresses
With all-embracing plans to mark anew
The mete and bound of all philosophies
In Heaven and earth, and chase to limbo shades
Decrepit fictions of the elder world.
If future ages would eclipse a plan
Of such exhaustive amplitude, 'twould seem
That sister planets must unite with ours
To prove the universe; or if confined
By natural laws to earth, the future man
Must fitly join with beasts to arbitrate
A re-adjustment of their mutual claims.

Now in this Parliament of human-kind
Had all the lesser cliques fulfilled their course
And held their innings. So the closing month
Was come that should all lingering issues solve
And speed the youthful century on its course
Triumphant.

Two assemblies now absorbed
The gathered people. In a stately hall
Embowered with floral charms a congress sat
Of women of the world in every type;
The queen of Europe's Courts, the beauty veiled
By Eastern harems, savagery enwrapt
In her rude blanket, dames of high career,
Maiden and matron and *religieuse*,
The loud-tongued talker, the submissive wife,
Athlete, domestic, and the frivolous girl
Drifting with currents of the modern age,
Minerva, Dian, Juno, Venus, all
Found prototype, and all intent to face
One problem by the finished centuries left
As heirloom to the future.

At the head
Behold Querella, queen of all the throng,
Holding the balance as the tangled coil

Should be resolved, the facts of woman's sex,
Its subtle power to make or mar the world;
Nor sex alone the theme, large fact indeed,
But not the only fact, as sex doth sink
Into the larger fact, humanity.
And though the final word should not be spoke,
For so the world itself might not contain
The books that should be written, none should fear
Boldly to face all truth and pierce the core
Of human mystery.

Thus they discoursed
Scripture and myth and logic and the maze
Of history's records. So was heard the fame
Of Portia, Juliet, Sappho, Milton's Eve,
Pilgrim Priscilla, Florence Nightingale,
Lucretia with her jewels, Helen of Troy,
The Virtuous Woman famed in Holy Writ,
Dorcas her garments folding, the Virgin blest
Of Raphael's vision, type of motherhood,—
All had their advocates and honors there.

Meanwhile across the Court another hall
An equal gathering held, for men aroused
By women's zeal were also met to face
The impending crisis. In the chair behold
Manlius, the leader, calmly resolute.

As heaving currents hastening toward the strait
Gather the floating straws with yellow froth
Commingled, thus did crude opinions float
And toss as surface freight above the tide
Of swelling purpose surging in alarm
Toward bold decisive ends still unrevealed.

"Our wives," they said "are in delusion gulfed.
To hear their maunderings one might well conceive
That woman was a late discovery
And luckless man her stern implacable foe."

"Ah!" it was answered, "Let the folly run
To its conclusions. Lures of fame will prove
Weaker than nature's laws. Fiction hath failed
Aught to discover saving marriage bands
As ending to the story."

"Yet," said one,
"Beware lest stinted justice we accord
To her we hold most dear. It helpeth not
The issue to belittle. It were best
Somewhat to yield. Humanity itself
Hangeth in poise. Haply if women fail
Through human frailty, rightly to divide
Strength from presumption, are we sure our skirts
Are spotless? Some unmanliness in us

Hath gendered ill in them. If our pretence
Of headship were well taken, surely fault
Inheres in us who had not grace to hold
Our kingdom steady."

"True," a voice replied,
"If in the moral world the woman's strength
Be highest, then is *she* the head, and men
To women's primacy must meekly bow.
Let us then mend our ways, and fitly yield
All fullest dues;—the sooner they'll return
To love and home."

"But why this paltry din?"
Another cried, "The time hath been perhaps,
When woman was opprest. But 'tis not now!
Nor do we merit such a rash contempt.
Surely 'twere time a just recognizance
Should re-enthrone the Ever-Womanly."
Added an eager voice, "'Tis nature's plan
That man should lead, and at his loving beck
The wife should follow. Though she oft may guide
By man's renouncements, yet if folly flaunts
Such rule as woman's birthright, then, perforce
We'll prick the bubble, Law must hold its own."

Thus either side with bold criterion shaped
Its wavering counsels. Hast thou never seen
How nature's laboratory slow prepares
Her separate compounds that at last shall join
With force precipitate, perhaps to blend
The brisk of ferment in one basic whole,
Or haply, with explosive burst to deal
Broadcast destruction to the world around?
To which conclusion think you, shall the clash
Of these strategic fateful ventures tend?

Now at the Woman's Hall the question rose
"What if a word of greeting we should send
Unto the men? So shall we prove ourselves
Of liberal mind."

Forthwith it was dispatched,
A message framed in formal courtesy.

The men surprised,
"Why heed such idle breath?
When women learn their duty it were time
To pause for parley."

Yet anon prevailed
A gentler counsel and came duly back
A deferent reply.

The women pleased,
"So far is fitting. It were trifling risk
Should we go farther. To our beauteous hall
We will invite them. It were well to know
Their trend of thinking."

Straightway was agreed.
Then a protesting voice, "How if they claim
In joint assembly that the men must hold
Official headship?"

"Banish needless fear,"
Querella answered. "It were better grace
Since they are guests, that by our courtesy
Their chairman should preside, nor yield we aught
In final wise of just prerogative."

Gravely the men debate the message sent,
If to accept would compromise their Cause.
"Gracious and fair the bidding seems," they said,
"Yet if sincerely meant, ours is the place
For the joint gathering."

So with careful phrase
They made acceptance:

'Twas a happy thought,
This Union meeting, where in friendly parle
Each congress could unfold its drift and aim;
But it were fitting that they now reverse
The invitation. Theirs the larger hall
And for such throngs the amplest audience room
Were none too spacious.

Now in turn arose
The counter-doubt, What if the women seek
Precedent rank since of themselves had come
The initial move? Surely 'twas meet, they said,
That Manlius hold his rightful place. Yet still
If to the Hall of Men with free accord
The women came, 'twas all that they would ask.
Besides, 'twas rumored that the women meant
To yield the point. So not to be outdone
In fairest courtesy, they would first invite
Querella to the chair.

Thus step by step
The plans were laid.

And now the women glowed
In preparation for the great event.
With flower-filled hands in happy groups they came
To make the spacious room a festive bower.
At morn betimes they all with best attire

And winning smiles betook them to the hall
Where gathering men doffing their careless ways
Now stepped with courtly grace.

So struck the hour.
With anxious expectation all the throng
Waited dénouement.

Manlius first arose.
"For tasteful skill that hath adorned these walls
We thank our gentle friends. I move that now
Madame Querella shall assume the rôle
Of dignity and here preside this day."
And there was stillness over all the room.

Then rose Querella,
"Nay, we beg that thou
In thine own hall retain thy usual place."

So each refused the office, till at last
'Twas put to vote. The men with one accord
Gave ballot for Querella, and the rest
Voted for Manlius. So there was a tie.

Now with a blush Querella rose. "My friends,
To-day I tell a secret that I thought
Should never pass my lips. But know you all
This is my husband. He shall act for me.

Are we not one? Let him then take the chair."
And all the women waved their handkerchiefs,
But all the men sat silent.

Manlius now
Stepped to Querella's side, "Honor bestowed
Upon my wife is honor shown to me,
I yield to her."

Then all the men broke forth
In loud applause.

Rosy and pale by turns
Querella speechless sat, with downcast look.
The silence painful grew. At last she rose,
White as a lily now her cheek, her eyes
Suffused with liquid lenses that enhanced
Their lustre, yet not filled, nor overflowed.
Thus trembling sunbeams in a breath of mist
Enlarge the radiance of the orb of day
When glad Aurora greets the waking world.
Soft and distinct her voice.

"Hear me," she said,
"The Woman-Soul the offspring is and heir
Of life in all its fulness, and her heart
Holdeth its own in treasure. Yet to-day
I do avow that dearer than all gifts

Of personal fame or vantage is the crown
Of wifehood that hath wreathed my woman's brow.
If it be needful, glad I now resign
The rights of selfhood for the sweeter bliss
Of yielding self unto the claims of love.
Manlius, my husband, take your wife again."

But ere the word was finished, Manlius grasped
The extended hand, all mastery now gone
From out the tender equal glance that met
Querella's,—glad, entreating, yielding all,
Yet with no loss of manly dignity.
Clear fell his words: "If it be needful? Nay,
Far be it that my blinded heart should claim
Wifely renunciation of the wealth
Of woman's heritage. My precious wife,
Never so much my chosen wife as now,
For all the graces of thy newer world
Are added jewels in thy wifely crown.
So let me now the husband's duty yield,
I, too, my life thus losing, that I may
Find it again in thine as thou in mine.—
But come we now apart. Our converse doth
Distract the meeting." So they drew aside.

Again was silence as the wondering throng
Waited expectant.

Then a timid voice,
"I mind me of an ancient tale enshrined
In Persian lore, of the unsymmetric bird,
The Juftak, dowered with a single wing.
But on the wingless side the male doth show
A hook and on the female stands a ring,
Only when fastened each to each can they
Fly to the upper air. The human race
Is that same Juftak. Read this fable well.
Since in our hall all human-kind are met,
Hath not our chairman need to be endowed
As man and woman both? Should not the two
Together hold this office?"

"Nay, indeed,"
Broke forth the general cry. "'Twere folly thus
To breed confusion. Either well may guide,
Manlius or Querella, and we care not which,
Since both are worthy, but no double head."

The first insistent, "Nay the twain are one,
The *only* whole. The family group is set
As social unit, its united pair
The representing type. Woman or man
Singly must halt, a fraction impotent
Of a life complete."

Now with a flashing eye
Uprose a woman tall, with lines of gray
Streaking her raven hair. "I pray you, friend,
Revoke the foolish word. Mother nor wife
Am I, yet dare to challenge that life's cup
May brim with other vintage. I have seen
Childless, unwedded women who knew more
Of faithful troth, of heart of motherhood,
Of life's deep stress and passion, of its heights
And deep abysms, its mastering pain and bliss,
Than many a one who weds and children bears
With human instincts all unsanctified
By spiritual insights. Lofty souls
Not set in matrimonial gardens may aspire
To beauteous blossom and perfected fruit.
The childless arms may clasp most tenderly
The sad unmothered children. Loves unclaimed
By husband or by wife may fructify
In largest fulness, ripening luscious gifts
To bless a hungering world. Dare ye believe
The Blessed One who shared our mortal lot
And tasted death for all humanity
Missed life's ideal for lack of marriage vows?
Christ's birth hath set a seal on motherhood,
But his example to the end of time
Hath also sanctified the virgin life
For man and woman both.

"Nor dare ye boast
Ye wedded mates, the undue monopoly
Of love's congenial fellowships. We all
As sister, daughter, brother, son, do move
In sweet relations with our mutual own.
Yea, even the solitary ones are set
Of God in families.

"And yet the links
The tenderest, dearest, that entwine true hearts
With souls akin, are wove from braided strands
Of fateful circumstance and yielding change.
But the Self-Unit absolute doth hold
Its sure identity. Nor time nor space
Divides me from MYSELF, sole integer
By nature's primal law. Singly our souls
Were born, singly we cross the final bourne
To meet our Maker and alone receive
The last arbitrament of joy or shame."
She ceased, but from her passionate words there fell
An oppressive silence over all the room.

Now rose an aged man, "Good are thy words,
My sister, yet a part is still untold.
Wheels lie within life's wheels. The steadfast day
Rolleth his course; so doth the solar year
His separate orbit swing; and each may serve

As measuring-rod of time. Nature's large plan
Includeth both the individual soul
And family bond. Yet neither doth embrace
Life's full content. A fraction still is each
Of the vaster unit, Great Humanity.
These lesser wholes, whence came they? Trace them back
To the far past. Look forward where they lead.
Lo, no beginning neither end appears
To the moving chain of living links that spans
Eternity. This then the primal fact,
We all are members of the boundless Whole,
Like planet worlds that wheel their ceaseless course
'Mid interstellar spaces, yet compose
One system intricate,—the Universe
Of spirit life that comprehends us all."

The old man took his seat. Uprose forthwith
One with the fire of action in his eye,
"Why waste we words? One question rules the hour.
Brethren, 'tis manhood's *privilege* to yield
To woman's moulding. As her true desire
Is to her husband, so be ours to her.
Bid *claims* begone! Querella well hath proved
Fitness for leadership. If she will take
The chair of office, it shall please us well."

"Nay, brethren, fathers, husbands, hear me now,"
Pleaded a woman's voice, "When manhood speaks
Words of such gentle justice as to-day
Have fallen on our ears, our souls are stirred
To nobler womanhood. Believe me, friends,
Woman is happiest when she freely yields
Unto her husband's love her personal life.
Querella,—*she hath said it*,—best were pleased
To leave the public task since Manlius stands
Ready to do it for her gentle sake."

Again the old man spoke, "To-day we face
Peculiar problems. Men and women we
Who, other issues waiving, would adjust
Our mutual obligations. It were wrong
If partial sympathies should vitiate
The just conclusion. For *to-day* at least
'Twere well befitting that our chairman hold
The dual gifts of life. Wherefore let both
Manlius and Querella here preside *this day*."

So it was voted. Then were quickly placed
Two chairs, Querella sitting at the right
Of Manlius, as the task he undertook
To organize the meeting. If arose
A variance, mutual counsel quickly served
To bring adjustment. When for transient cause

Her husband turned aside, Querella stept
Unto the fore, and so progressed the work
Right merrily. All was equipped at last,
With chosen officers in full supply
Installed for duty.

Manlius now arose,
"What is the business that hath called us here?
Will some one now propose?"

But no one spoke.
Each turned to other striving to recall
The questions they had gathered to resolve.
And none could think. Indeed it almost seemed
That all was done. What was there to decide?
For all relations of the human race
Seemed to be settled, and was nothing left.

At last with trembling tone a voice began
The old Doxology. 'Mid smiles and tears
All caught the strain and loud the welkin rang.

Then rose Querella. "It was in our plan
To ask you all to dine. At two o'clock
In Woman's Hall the dinner will be served.
The intervening hour may well be given
To social converse. Let us now adjourn."

So it was voted. And within that hour
Did many a wife regain her husband's side,
And brother sought for sister, and withal
Full many a youthful heart gave quick response
To thrilling glance or touch of kindred soul.

Then at the signal arm in arm they passed
Unto the banquet. At its happy close
As wit and wisdom kindled, every eye
Sought Manlius and Querella where they sat
Gracing the feast at its presiding board.
"Our Presidents."—Responsive to the toast
They rose and clasping hands as if to take
New marriage vows, in clear duet they sang;
While every eye was moist, and at the close
Echoed tumultuous bursts of long applause.

MANLIUS AND QUERELLA.

MUTUAL love hath sealed our union,
Loyal hearts in us are wed,
Each the stronger, each the weaker,
Each submissive, each the head.

Heirs alike in equal lineage
To the wealth of life's estate,
Neither will the heavenly birthright
E'er deny or desecrate.

Nature's leadings felt within us
Follow we with gentle awe,
Breaking bonds of old conventions
If they fetter primal law.

Yet to either will the other
In all honor still defer,
Man and woman joined in duty
She to him as he to her.

So our troth is firmly plighted
Till we rest beneath the sod,
Each to self, and each to other,
Both to each, and each to God.

POSTLUDE.

THE story was told, but my spirit had sped
Afar beyond limits of time or of space
Across trackless forests and oceans widespread,
Away from humanity's trace,
Till I stood in a featureless desert alone,
Aweary of living, opprest by the irritant wrangle
Of men, so unskilled to resolve life's complicate tangle,
When suddenly towered before me
The Sphinx of the ages, its eyes,
Those calm inscrutable eyes,
Looked forth from the cold dead stone
Shedding an influence o'er me
That filled me with solemn surprise.
I felt me no longer alone,
But as if in my heart throes the statue could feel
The stress of life's passion, its endless appeal
To an infinite something, a silent beseeching
For Eternity's clue, Time's issues outreaching.

If to man or to woman such look could belong
As I saw on the statue, I knew not, I cared not.

But somehow its spell like a tide of the ocean
O'erswept my faint heart with a speechless emotion,
And question it further, I dared not.
Transfixed by the gaze yet too weary to ponder
The mysterious look, I let my eyes wander
And follow its far away glance till it came
To the distant horizon, and there I discovered
A mirage of the desert, a fair
And wonderful picture of air
That low in the Orient hovered.

At first indistinct and remote was the vision,
But soon gathered clearness, precision;
Two crystaline spheres revolving, as held
Like binary stars to one center compelled
By a mutual force, that each circuit impelled.
In size and in lustre I thought them the same,
Yet scanning more closely, I difference knew
In the radiant orbs so worthily mated,
For the rays of the one seemed chiefly of light,
The other with heat seemed to pulsate and glow.

With intricate movement I watched them pursue
Their paths unrelated,
When, lo!
They were bearing together. I anxiously waited
With paralyzed sense as one waiteth the flash
Of the lightning stroke or the thunderbolt's crash.

How useless my fears! They melt into one
With a movement majestic and fleet.
Lo! a single sphere endowed like the sun,
With life-giving light and heat.
The statue and I were enwrapt in the beams
That stretched far away in out-flashing streams
To the bounds of creation,
And I bowed me in mute adoration.

For now in its center a vision doth glow
A face like the face of the Christ strong and tender.
The artists of old sought to render
The Lord of humanity so,
With features of manhood and womanhood blent,
As if each in its fulness had lent
Perfections of beauty, of power, and grace
To the dual worshipful face.
Yea, thus in the pattern for all mankind
Must the graces of all be enshrined.

As I pondered the vision so strange
I was suddenly ware of a change.
Christ's face into that of the Father seemed turning,
A fatherhood potent, yet gentle and yearning

As the mother who comforts the child of her love
With motherhood's comfort, all comforts above,—
A parental presence, all-loving, all seeing,
The primal source of all Being.

But quickly the miracle sped,
And suddenly lifting my head,
The statue alone was before me;
With deep inscrutable eyes that drew me
Yet seemed to go o'er me, beyond me, and through me,
The eyes, not of woman or man, but of SOUL,
A spirit sublimed from humanity's whole.

So there in the desert, no visitant nigh,
We faced it in silence, the statue and I,
The question of Ages, the measureless strife
Of the problem unending, the problem of LIFE.

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